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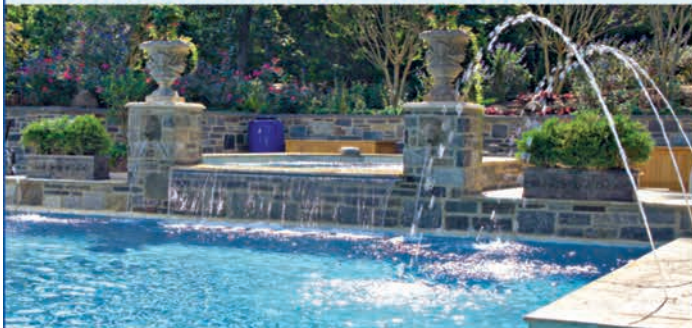
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EDUCATIONAL ELEMENTS Edited by Liz Hunter

What to know about... next generation faux plants

There's no denying the enjoyment that comes from having fresh flowers and plants in a home, but for some, the maintenance that comes along with it can be frustrating, especially when things don't survive. Faux plants may have been a faux-pas in years past, but thanks to new technology that embraces the imperfections of real plants and flowers, it's almost impossible to spot the fakes. The trend is now being embraced in home décor, with mainstream brands expanding

They are a long-term investment

Fresh flowers need to be changed weekly and can be expensive.

Real houseplants have longevity but are costly to replace.

their selections, including Balsam Hill, known for its faux Christmas trees and holiday décor. Here, the company offers some of the top reasons to use faux plants around your home, along with some examples that will have you doing a double-take.

Less Maintenance

No need to water, feed, repot or arrange for care when you take a vacation.

They stay fresh all year round

With proper care, they will look like the first day you bought them for years. Look for UV protected plants for outdoor use to ensure they don't fade.

Hypoallergenic

Great for people with allergies.

Non-Toxic to Pets

Live plants can be toxic to pets; artificial plants can eliminate that risk.

Safe from Infestation

Faux plants have few risks of parasites, pests or other foreign substances.



Vibrant Summer Bloom Garland (\$129)



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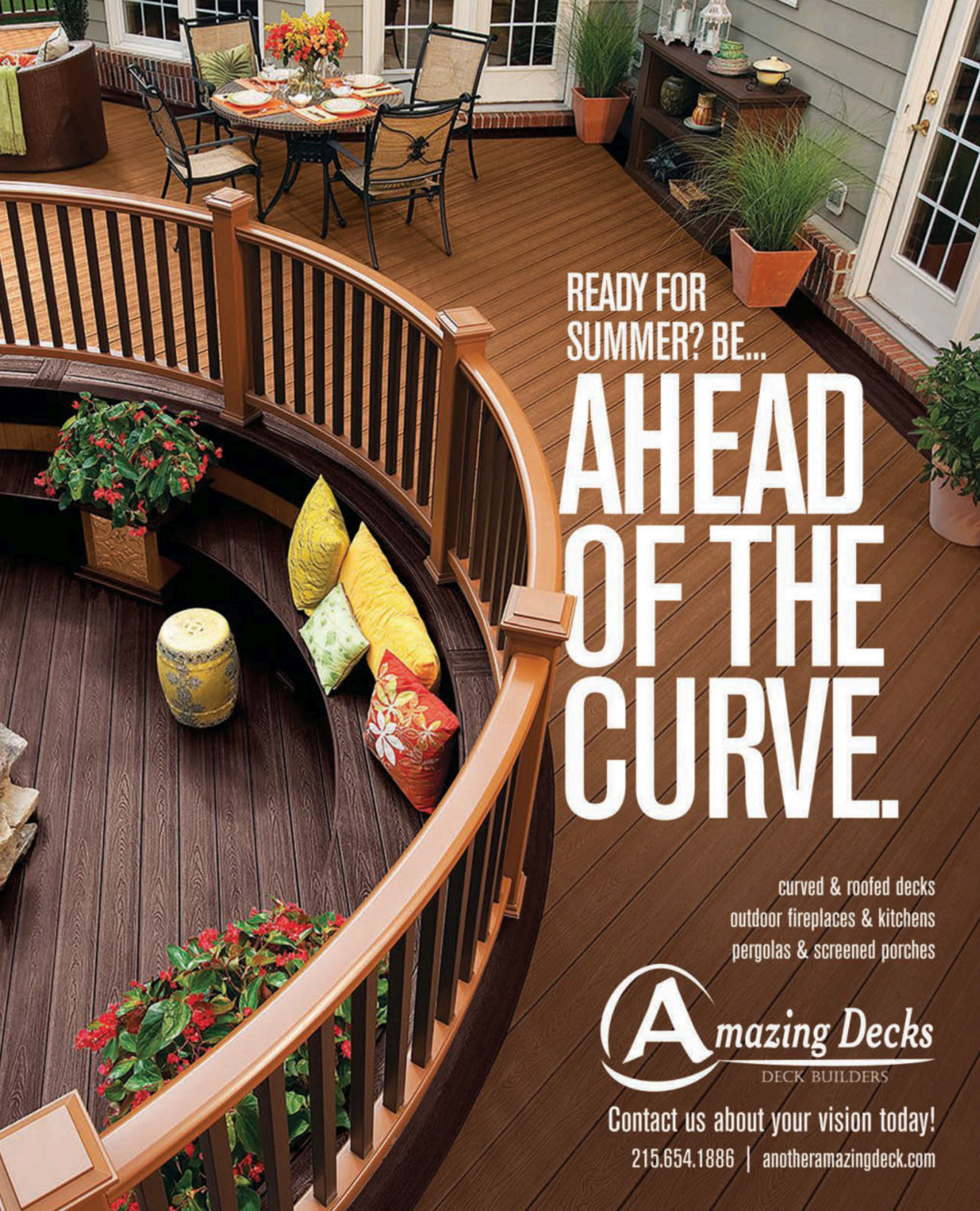
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heart of the house

Design/build company Amazing Decks has over 20 years of deck building expertise.

Spring is here, which means the start of warmer weather and more days spent outside. It might also have you thinking about starting a backyard project to extend your living space. But where to start? Building an addition such as a deck is a major project that involves numerous professionals, including a contractor, various craftsmen and sometimes an architect. It can be overwhelming, time-consuming and costly for the homeowner to coordinate between all of those service providers, but there's one company that has simplified the process by bringing all of those services together under one roof—Amazing Decks.

Amazing Decks has over 20 years of deck building expertise and specializes in taking projects from conceptual design through completed construction.

"They don't understand design or flow; they don't take into consideration where the grill and couch is going; how the deck exits and enters onto the background," owner Bill Wilson says of construction companies.

What Wilson and his team take into consideration is expanding the "heart of the house"—the kitchen into your outdoor living space. "The heart of the house is where homeowners and guests naturally gravitate to," he says. "That's where everyone spends time and we revolve the living space inside your house around that. You want to marry the heart of the house to the deck, and you want to marry the deck to the backyard.

"Building an outside/inside room takes a lot of experience. You have to know about gas appliances, fireplaces, water features, plants, landscape design, hardscaping, patios, different materials and textures, and find a way to put it in someone's budget. Most people limit looking at materials at [places like] Home Depot. Wouldn't you rather call someone who knows every material available?"

Wilson says homeowners have the impression that design/build companies are



more expensive, but that is not the case. Because they buy many building materials in bulk, from decking products to fasteners, railings and stone, it lowers the price for the homeowner.

"We know every material that's available so we can fit a high-end project into a normal, medium range budget," he says. "People can get a lot more for their money if they hire a design firm."

By not hiring a design firm, Wilson says you run the risk of problems arising shortly after, and he and his team have encountered several of those problems after homeowners called them to help fix the situation.

"Decks are built too large and lack usable space, decks require service but the contractor who built it doesn't return to fix it, decks aren't integrated to the slope of the yard, and stairs are placed where it would be cheapest to build and there was no taking into consideration the flow from the back door to the pool, to the driveway and to the patio," Wilson explains. "A designer takes all of this into consideration when creating a project and also knows how to create space on a deck without it having to be so large."

Amazing Decks pays attention to every little detail, and working together on each project as a team enables them to maintain an efficient construction schedule. Additionally, they take every part of your backyard into consideration when designing a space

now and possibly in the future.

"For example, when I design backyards, I ask them if they want a pool. They may say no, but you don't want to shut your backyard off," Wilson says. "You cannot build something now that will preclude them from having a pool someday; you don't want to limit your property."

Amazing Decks uses only the best materials available, such as Trex composite decking products. Wilson is excited about a new line of decking products Trex recently launched—Trex Enhance—that is durable and affordable, especially for first-time homebuyers.

"It's excellent coating and designed for first-time homebuyers," Wilson says. "Coming out of school, they have a lot of debt but they want to purchase a house. This is a good entry point for them because there's no maintenance and they don't have to worry about cleaning the deck."

Installing a deck doesn't just provide aesthetic value; it significantly boosts the home's resale value. "We designed an entire backyard for a couple; they didn't spend any money updating anything inside the house—it was all put into the deck," Wilson says. "When they put their house for sale, they received many comments about the deck and how nice of a project it was. There were four or five other homes in the area also for sale, all listed before this one, and it was sold first all because of the deck." **H&H**

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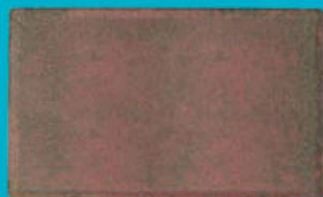
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BY DANIEL SEAN KAYE

Big or small, every element of a bathroom remodel adds up to a look you'll love.

ONE THING IS FOR SURE: THERE IS MUCH TO CONSIDER WHEN IT'S TIME FOR A BATHROOM

REMODEL. From styles to tiles, you can spend a lot of time and energy making decisions. What homeowners need most is information, and this is where our experts can help.

BATHROOM BASICS

Approaching a bathroom remodel can be more challenging than any other room in the house, according to John Lang, owner of Lang's Kitchen & Bath, who suggests a good starting-off point is finding that one thing you really love in the space and then working from there. "This gives the designer a good understanding of a style the homeowner likes."

The bathroom should reflect the homeowner's aesthetics, says Mike Werner, sales manager of AAA Hellenic Marble. "Whether it's trends, looks or materials, make it right for the people using it. What makes it functional for them? What are their personal preferences?"

The best designer will marry product selections with the home's look, says Quinn Harbright, designer for Brindisi Builders. "Also, they will help to ensure that products are ordered in proper quantities and sizes."

Fran Isaacson, CKBR, owner of Inspiration Kitchen & Bath, says that it's "to the homeowner's advantage to work with a designer/contractor who can supply quality materials versus

Photo courtesy of Amiano & Son Design-Build

bathing IN THE details

chased by someone who knows the correct sizes needed for the project.” It’s also crucial to know the quality of the tile. You can never tell that of the ones sold at big-box stores.

Experts in this industry often consider details that may be overlooked elsewhere. “Bathrooms have higher moisture than the rest of the house and having cabinetry that is built to withstand elements will look better and last longer,” says Steven Matteo, the co-owner and designer for Matteo Family Kitchens and Flooring. Cabinets using plywood built in the U.S. allow for better moisture control whereas imported cabinets that come by ship can have issues as they acclimate to our climate.

Product selection can also be influenced by which type of bathroom is being remodeled. “There’s a big difference between master and hall bathrooms,” explains David Cerami, CKBR, owner of HomeTech Renovations. “In the master you usually have a tub or shower to consider. But most people no longer want the large fiberglass or whirlpool tubs. They take up a huge space and people typically don’t have time for a long bath. In addition, they are often not plumbed right. People want large multifunction showers with body sprays, bench seating and music.”

DECIDING ON SPECIFICS

When it comes time to pick the various design elements in the bathroom, many homeowners get too hung up on what has the most staying power.

“There are no tried and true elements in bathrooms,” says Matteo, who has been doing slate looks and textured tiles with glass accents for years, but now is finding people want tile planks that look like wood for the floor and clean simple lines for shower walls. “As the DIY trends go, so do we. Farmhouse looks are what we are seeing. Thank you Chip and Joanna Gaines for that,” he says. Also, cabinet, tile and countertop manufacturers are trending to similar colors—gray tones, taupe and similar looks.

Many homeowners want bathrooms that pop and make a statement, says Sophia Amiano, design assistant at Amiano & Son Design-Build. “Large mirrors, different colored metal faucets,

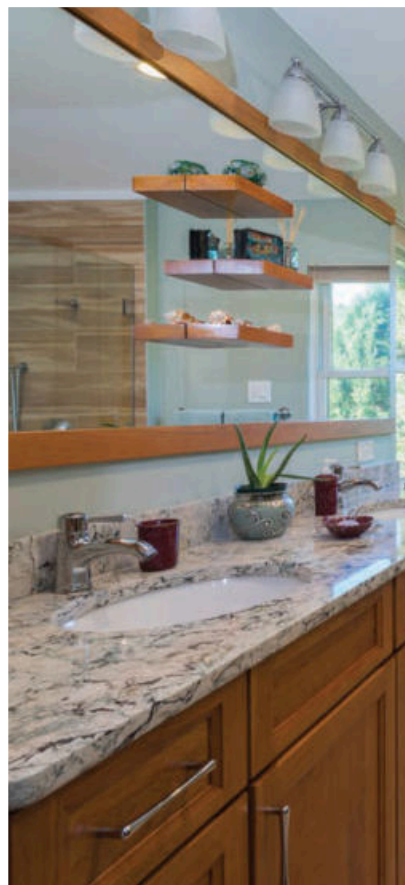
items purchased online. You never know the quality of items sold online until they arrive to the home, oftentimes broken or the faucets leak, etc. Cabinetry is best purchased by someone who knows the correct sizes needed for the project.”

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“There’s a big difference between master and hall bathrooms,” explains David Cerami, CKBR, owner of HomeTech Renovations. “In the master you usually have a tub or shower to consider. But most people no longer want the large fiberglass or whirlpool tubs. They take up a huge space and people typically don’t have time for a long bath. In addition, they are often not plumbed right. People want large multifunction showers with body sprays, bench seating and music.”



accent walls, etc., have all been popular options,” she says. “One thing you can never go wrong with is a neutral palette in a bathroom, such as whites, grays or very light blues.”

When redoing the space, consider reconfiguring. Maybe a larger shower or a clawfoot tub, and perhaps a vanity with natural stone such as marble or engineered quartz, Werner says. It’s good to use materials that seem to work with the look you want. “If you have a rustic ‘old farmhouse’ feel you wouldn’t use polished marble. You’d want a slate-look tile or soapstone,” says Werner. “Maybe look at stone accent walls in the shower or pebbles in the floor like a spa. Consider decorative accents, too. And think about seamless solid slab materials since they eliminate grout work and really enhance the project.”

Tile in wet areas is always popular versus solid surface materials such as acrylic or fiberglass, says Harbright. “It allows for a

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client to broaden the color spectrum of materials used in a bathroom, while still serving the more utilitarian task of a moisture barrier,” she says.

“White toilets, sinks and tubs are the best choice by far. White goes with everything,” says Isaacson. “Brushed nickel faucets are great options to hide water spots as much as possible. Darker fixtures may be harder to keep clean, depending on how the water is.” As for tile, she prefers uniform tiles in lighter tones in small spaces. “There are attractive porcelain tiles that look like marble that can be used in any design scenario, and accent tiles can always be added in for extra design interest,” she says.

“You want features consistent with your aesthetic values.

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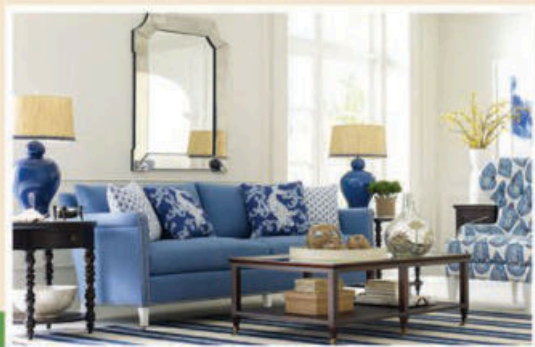
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People have different tastes. With tile, there are varied formats, sizes, shapes. There are special glass panels that offer neat design details,” says Cerami. “Some black finishes on faucets can look sharp in the right light, as do gold finishes. Free-standing tubs, vessel tubs are like pieces of art. There are one-piece, dual-flush toilets that are sleek, minimal.”

There are many new products Amiano likes, including finishes for faucets such as different shades of gold, rose gold or newly released sleek black

finishes. “I love the aged, weathered look that has been incorporated into some of the styles of tile,” she says.

“People are using porcelain slabs, some as big as natural stone,” says Werner. They are thin, easy to work with, and offer interesting looks. And unlike natural stone, they are not porous. “They are very durable,” he says.

Lang singles out porcelain Dekton countertops which offer an array of different colors and “[are] almost bullet-proof.” **H&H**



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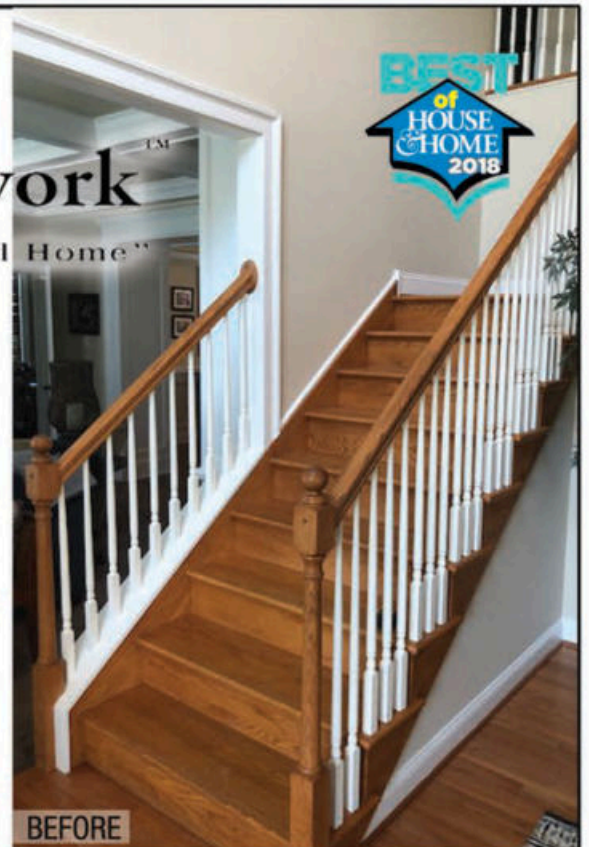
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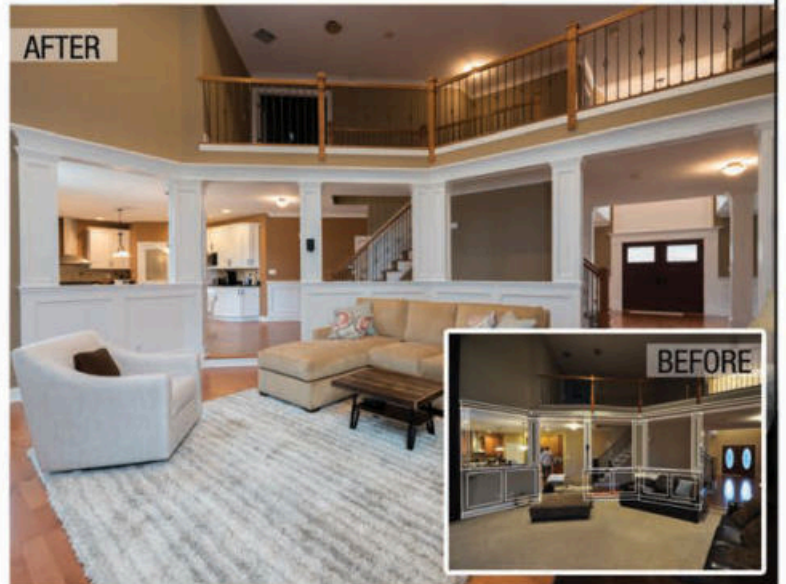
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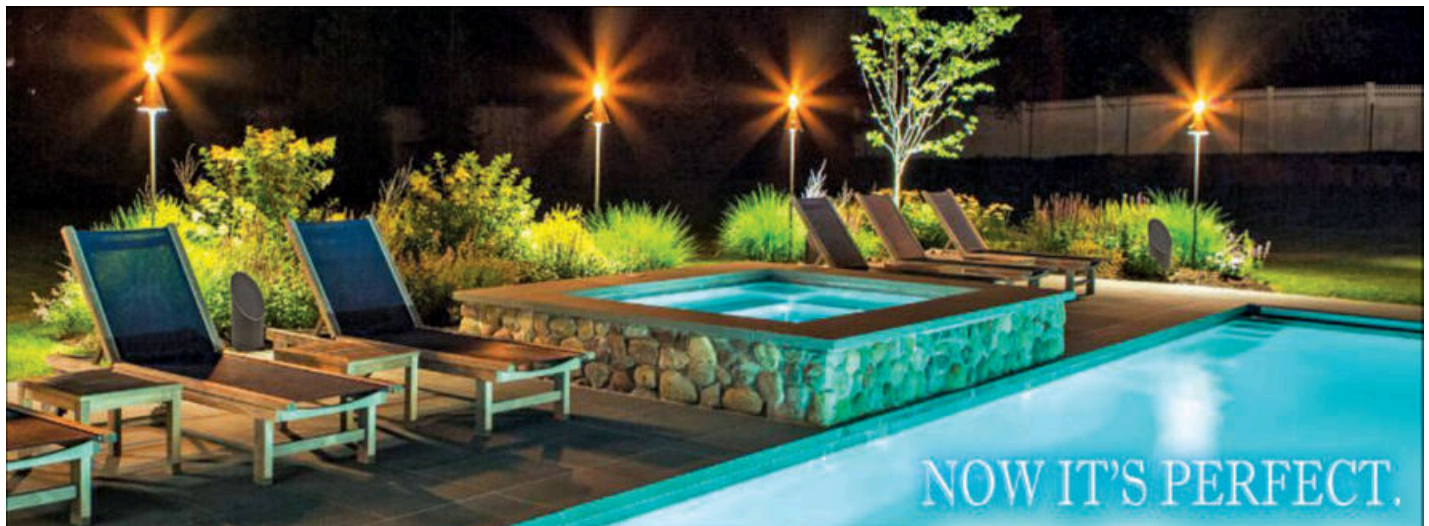
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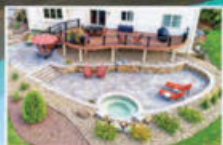
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Ryann Reed Design Build

by **Liz Hunter**

Communication is one of the most important elements to a successful remodeling project.

It happens in the early stages when a homeowner expresses their wants and needs for the space and continues through to construction and completion. One hiccup along the way can sour the whole experience.

At Ryann Reed Design Build, a sister firm of Remodeling Concepts, every aspect of a remodeling project is integrated into one organization. From kitchen and bathrooms to basements and additions, Ryann Reed Design Build handles it from the ground up and is the sole point of contact for clients throughout the process.

We spoke with Dave Martin, president, about why communication is a priority (and how they back it up) and why it's essential for the company and its clients to get to know each other.

What are some qualities that make Ryann Reed Design Build stand out in the industry?

I think a lot of people always say they care about communication, but we mean it. We actually offer an online portal that gives clients access to all of their product selections, daily communications with the team, progress pictures, project tracking tools. If they have a question, it goes to the entire team, instead of sending it to one person and hoping they get it and then waiting for a response. We want total transparency so clients can see what is happening.

Our mission is to enhance the quality of lives by transforming homes and building trusting relationships through a team-oriented approach. We live by our "RECIPE" of core values: relationships, empowerment, community, integrity, play and excellence.



EXPERTISE: KITCHEN/BATH REMODELING



Dave Martin, President

What is different about working with a design-build firm?

The difference in working with a design-build firm (versus a contractor) is that we create a true design just for you. We're going to look at the entire space, not just replace things where they already were. We're going to see about removing walls if possible, or moving the kitchen to another spot in the home if it makes sense. We want it to be as functional as possible, and we'll get into the nitty-gritty of how you use your kitchen with a survey. We'll ask about cooking habits because cooks and bakers need different things. We will also look at everything you have in the kitchen, from the number of appliances to how many sets of dishes and glasses you have. These all contribute to the functionality and allow us to design based on the anticipated spot and access to these items.

Tell us a little bit about what clients might expect while working with you.

We start with a preliminary phone call to help understand the clients' needs and desires before we go to their house. We want to hear their ideas and the scope of the work to make sure it's something we can achieve because it should be a proper fit not just for them, but us as well. We do ask to know the budget so we can maximize it. If we are on the same page we'll do an

in-house meeting followed by an appointment in our showroom where the clients can see a rendering of the design as a starting point.

Once a project development agreement is authorized, we'll get into the nuts and bolts of the design, meeting bi-weekly to finish the materials selection before moving on to construction. Once that phase begins, every project will have a dedicated lead carpenter on site and a production manager checks in weekly as the liaison between the office and the site. Because we perform most of the work ourselves, we can cut most timelines in half.

Are there any kitchen or bath products you are particularly excited to offer clients?

As mentioned earlier, storage and functionality are everything when it comes to design, and cabinets are a big piece of this whether it's in a kitchen, bathroom, basement or an addition. We're a dealer for Wellborn Cabinet, which offers a semi-custom cabinet line that meets any need we have, from custom bars to mudrooms with hooks and cubbies. The company offers 6,000 different combinations of style and color to achieve any look you want. It's a family-owned company located in Alabama and everything is made on site, which means the quality is 100 percent on them; they aren't relying on other vendors. Shipments come directly to us from the factory and no middle person is involved. **H&H**

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Fences serve such valuable functions on a property. Whether for protection, privacy or aesthetic appeal, fences come in all shapes and sizes to serve your needs. If you're in the market for a fence, then you might be wondering what your options are and how to choose what's right for you.

Paul Stein, owner of Elegant Fence, says that your specific needs as a homeowner will help start the process of finding the fence that is right for you. While some people choose to install a fence in order to keep their pets in their own yard, others are specifically looking for privacy from the neighbors, or perhaps blocking out a view they don't want to see. With properties that back up to a busy road or an adjacent park, homeowners might want to block out as much of the view and sound as possible.

Of course, for many, the need for a fence is related to a pool. Stein, who works with dozens of pool companies in four different states, says that adding a fence around a pool is not only the safe thing to do—it's a required mandate in order to fulfill local code.

Whatever the reasons may be that you need a fence, Stein says that discussing your needs with a fence professional will help get the ball rolling.

"This will help direct you to the type of fence that will work best for you," he adds. "A professional can help guide you with the process."

MATERIALS MATTER

In terms of the material used for your fence, there are many different choices on the market. However, there's no question that most homeowners are moving away from higher maintenance materials, like wood. Wood requires ongoing upkeep including sanding, painting or staining. These days, many are more interested in higher quality, longer lasting materials that are going to hold up for the long term without tons of upkeep. The fence experts we spoke with all agreed that homeowners are generally willing to pay a little more on the front end in order to ensure they have less work and better quality in the long run.

"More and more homeowners are moving to vinyl fences," says Steve Mullen, sales manager for FenceUSA. "Through the years, the products have become easier to



install and maintain and have a great aesthetic look. On top of traditional colors, there are now many woodgrain-looking products such as the new Forrest Collection that offers a great upscale, woodgrain appearance. The technology used gives it a great look with no flaking and very low maintenance—while also lasting a long time."

John DiGianivittorio Jr., operations manager at American Discount Fence, agrees that vinyl is a very popular choice for its low maintenance quality.

"In terms of color, white, tan and khaki colors are easy to clean with a very light power wash or the use of a soft bristle brush with a mixture of dishwashing liquid and warm water," he explains.

While vinyl is undoubtedly popular, Stein says that he is getting a lot of interest in bronze aluminum fences. In fact, he says that's probably his No.1 seller right now—something that he attributes to the fact that it is "non-assuming."

"The material blends in with everyone's natural backyard instead of sticking out like an eyesore," Stein explains. "As we're seeing more natural backyards with boulders and patios that use earth tone pavers, I think people are becoming more interested in a



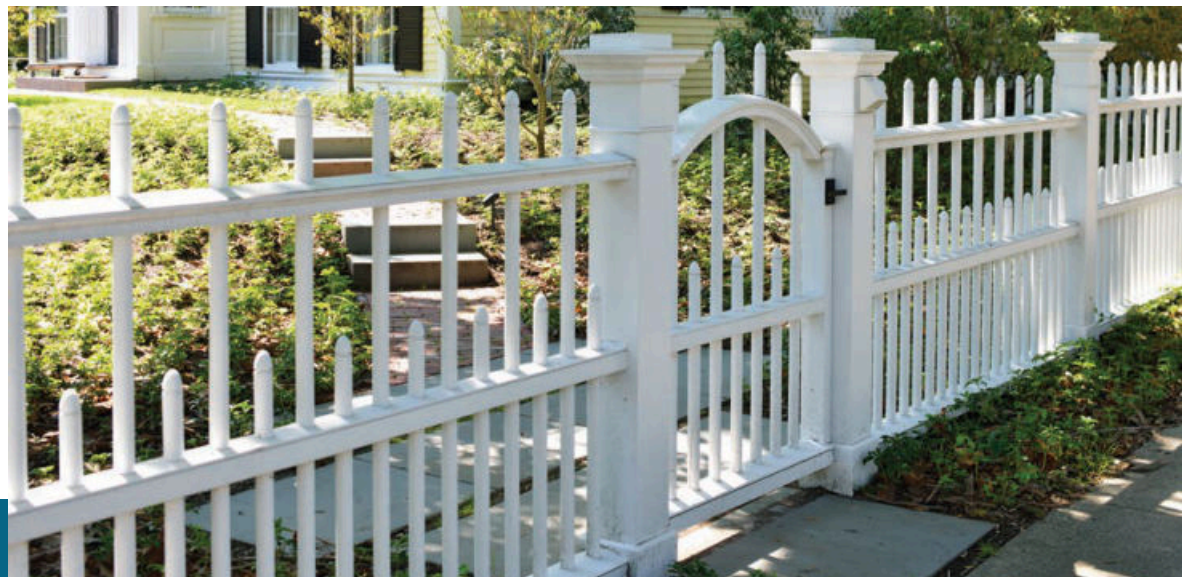
fence that blends in. Another benefit of aluminum is that it's low maintenance."

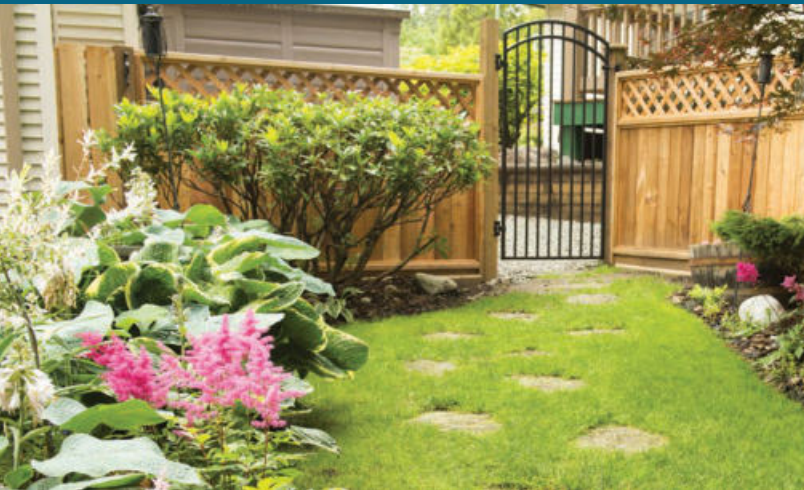
Montco Fence & Superior Structures uses Jerith aluminum fencing, which comes with a lifetime warranty on the material. "Every component of Jerith aluminum fencing is 100 percent made in the USA, and was never melted down or re-fabricated like many of their competition companies around these days," says Kelsey Gilinger. "Their fencing is powder coated with their patented FencCoat Finish. This is an environmentally friendly powder coating to ensure it will never rust, peel, chap, blister, warp or corrode."

POPULAR ADDITIONS

There are a number of ways to add some additional interest to your fence in the form of accessories or "add-ons." Stein says that he's seeing a lot of interest in string lights in outdoor areas and some homeowners are connecting them to the fence with special attachments. This can really brighten up a space and add visual interest. Of course, there are also ways to incorporate lighting directly into the fence.

"The most popular add-ons are solar lights often used for the top of the gates and the corner





posts,” says DiGianivittorio. “It’s important to make sure that the area you are going to use these solar caps on gets plenty of sunlight during the day in order to work properly. You will also need to change the rechargeable batteries at least one time per year as part of their normal maintenance.”

The hardware you choose for your fence will also have an impact on its overall look.

“There are many ways to add some ‘flair’ to your fence,” adds Mullen. “Hardware used on fences can be upgraded or you can use different latches. Adding lattice to the top portion of the fence is another way to give it a unique look.”

Stein agrees that solar caps are popular and says the nice thing about them is that they can be installed years down the road.

“We’re getting a lot of calls from homeowners looking to spice up their fence by adding solar caps or decorative ball caps to their existing fences,” Stein says. “These are easy additions that can be done at any time.”

In general, Stein says that he’s getting increased interest in “fence renovations” or “upgrades.”

“Upgrading an existing fence can change the entire look of a property,” Stein says. “People don’t realize just how much of an impact the fence has on the overall look of their space until they go for that upgrade. It’s a great aesthetic addition to a property that also goes a long way in boosting its value.”

While not exactly something with flair, gates are

another element not to overlook, says Gilinger. She recommends that the gates homeowners will use most often be no more than 3 or 4 feet wide for a single gate. “I always like to mention to customers if you plan to use a lawn service in the future (or if you do currently), almost all of them will require a double gate to get their equipment in,” Gilinger says. “Most standard riding mowers have a 42-inch deck, so a single gate will be fine for that, but the zero-turn style mowers will need a much larger opening.” **H&H**



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Who founded the company and when?

Brett founded the company in 1989 as Custom Design Interiors. He changed the name to Blind Builders, Inc. in 1994.

What made you want to start or be part of this business?

Brett: I was a stock boy in a linen shop in Northeast Philadelphia that sold blinds and shades. They'd send me along on installation jobs, so I began installing at 14. By 16, I was driving their truck and going out solo on jobs. After high school, I saw so much potential for this industry—from both sales and an installation perspective. I was a natural entrepreneur, so this made sense. I began selling and making vertical blinds in my dad's garage. The rest is history.

Nikki: I married Brett in 2006 and I was working for the Eagles at the time. Although that was a "cool" job; I wanted to be married to my husband, not the team. Coming to work for the business seemed

like a good idea but I was not 100 percent sure. After lots of contemplating and conversation, we decided to give it a go. Here we are 13 years later.

What makes your family business unique?

The business wasn't handed down to Brett; he started this on his own. People often assume his parents or some other family members are in the business. I think that is something Brett should be proud of. Now all these years later, in our office, we consider each other our "Blind Builders family." Our team cares about the business as much as we do. We also care about each other, both personally and professionally. We are lucky to have that.

What are some challenges you've faced working with family members?

Our agreement from day one was "work stays at the office" and "home is home."

Over the years, as the business and our lives have grown, it's become more challenging. But we are both very aware of maintaining that balance, and I think we do a pretty good job—or at least we try!

What are the advantages and/or what do you find rewarding about working with family members?

The most rewarding aspect is that we are mutually invested and committed to the same goals, but in a different way than most households. It's a very fulfilling feeling to have that connection. I can't imagine our life if we didn't have this.

What is your favorite thing to do together as a family outside of work?

As a small family of three, we enjoy easy things like going out for dinner (and not having to cook). We also love everything Disney, from movies to artwork and visiting the parks. Brett and our daughter also have a mutual love for the Animal Planet show *Tanked*. **H&H**

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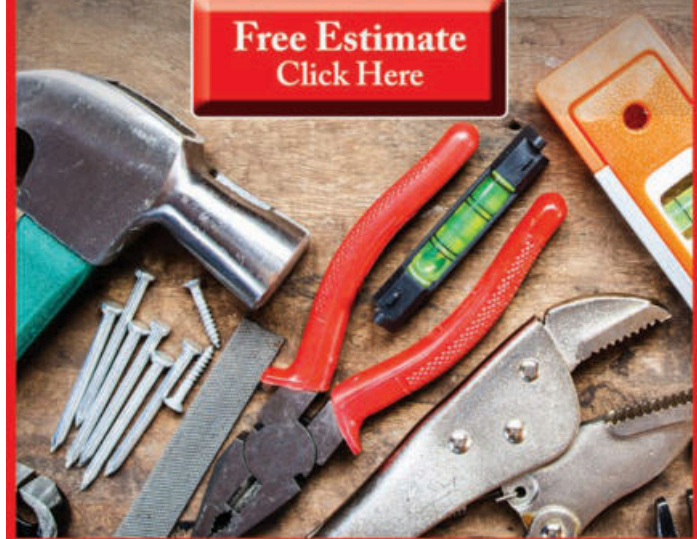
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Collegeville-based Basement Waterproofing Specialists is a “family” business, in every sense of the word.

They are fourth-generation American contractors. Every employee feels like a member of the family. The office employees work together in an environment intentionally reminiscent of a large family home. And the company's philosophy, its formula for success from the very beginning, has been to treat each customer as they would a family member.

“When I started out, the simple management tool that I learned from my father and grandfather was, ‘If this was your mother's house, how would you take care of it?’” says Ken Klinger, CEO. “We have instilled that same philosophy in every one of our foremen on every job, and everyone who answers the phone.” Klinger and his wife Debbie recently handed the ownership reins over to daughter Anne and son-in-law Scott Graham. Ken and Debbie Klinger remain highly active in the company.

Serving the entire region, Basement Waterproofing Specialists is headquartered in a refurbished 150-year-old stone farmhouse in Collegeville. Its main office consists of Second Avenue and they have a new addition of a 150-year-old building on River Road. Their Second Avenue location has a spacious fenced-in backyard where the Klingers' beloved Turkish boz shepherds, Clarabelle and Calvin, can frolic while they work during the day.

“We bought this building for our business because it is our other home,” Klinger explains. “We have created a family environment. We are really lucky because we have the most amazing people who work with us. Everybody here, we really assume is our extended family and we take care of them that way. That's why we are so successful. That's why we've increased our business tremendously.”

The building's converted rooms bustle with activity. Smiling, cordial office staff—Steve Johnson, Donna Wardle, Dominic Corrado, Jennifer Armstrong, Sharon Love, Vicki Cipollini, Paul Sumler, Paul Mathewson, Jessie Kanagie, Nichole D'Arconte, Shane Harris, Linda Mullin, Rob Mullin, John Cappelli, Shirelle Watkins, Alyssa Florentino, Justin Weatherill, and Jim Welsh—stay busy with phone calls and managing projects. All of the office staff and all of the production crews out in the field contribute to the company's success, Klinger says, emphasizing that he and his employees truly identify with their customers and the issues they face, and they are serious about treating each job as if it is for a member of their family.

“What's interesting is, people call a lot of the times and they are not sure what their problems are,” Klinger says. “They think they know. Any one of our guys will go in and honestly pretend it's their house. They do a full inspection, inside and outside, and they determine what they feel the customer needs. We don't try to sell them anything. It's about determining what they actually need. When you communicate that to a customer, they realize you are not talking at them, you are working with them, and that is really important.”

Through the years, Basement Waterproofing Specialists has accumulated a long list of satisfied customers throughout Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware. “We are so grateful to our customers for referring as many customers as they do,” Klinger says.

Basement Waterproofing Specialists distinguishes itself from others in the industry not only in terms of excellent customer service, but also in terms of the superior quality of their work and track record of success, based on their ability to correctly diagnose and correct the specific issue unique to each situation.

Klinger points out that most basement waterproofing companies specialize in just one form of waterproofing, the installation of a basic inside French drain. That will work in many applications, he says. “But if you go 75 miles away and you're in New Jersey with high sand content, or inversely if you go into the Pocono Mountains or Lancaster County, you're going to find different environments and conditions.” You may also want to redirect the water away from your home so it never enters your foundation, he explains.

“We have 13 different levels of waterproofing systems, which are customized per a particular job,” Klinger says. “These water management systems can be installed both inside and outside of your home. We also do inside and outside foundation repair whereas most of our residential competition does one type of waterproofing system and foundation repair and it's always inside.”

Basement Waterproofing Specialists provides an extensive array of services to address virtually any issue related to waterproofing; foundation structural repairs and/or replacement; drainage systems; mold and mildew inspection and remediation; and much more.

“Customers can sense when you really care about their problem,” Klinger adds. “Yes we are there to do a job to make money, but it's not always about that. In this day of complications, it still comes down to one thing: It's what's inside of you. It's about relationships. What you see is what you get with us. Even down to something small. Our contracts have an American flag on the back and no small print. It's the way we do business.” **H&H**

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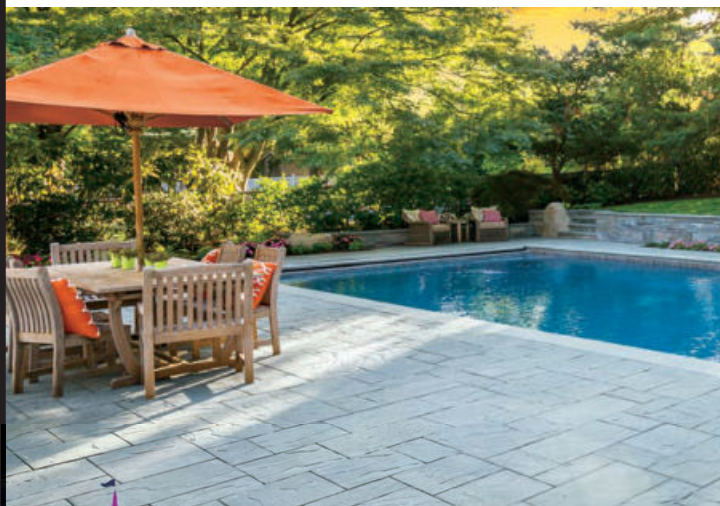
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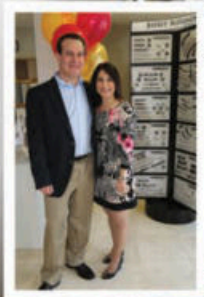
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A coveted amenity for many homeowners, swimming pools provide a private oasis right outside the back door, offering the ability to sit back and relax when life seems to be a little too crazy.

by Amanda Hamm Hengel



Though we may be in the throes of winter right now, there's no time like the present for homeowners to take a look at what may need to be fixed or upgraded in and around their pools so that when the time is right, taking advantage of that little oasis is a pleasure, not a headache.

"Most homeowners seem to have an idea after they have closed their pool as to what needs the pool may have in the spring," says Mike McCool, general manager for Swim-Mor Pools. "Depending on the age and condition of the equipment and the pool, they may have been postponing some repairs for a few years. An especially harsh winter could speed up the need for some cosmetic repairs, or even a renovation."

Though postponing repairs may be the easiest—or what seems like the most fiscally sound—option at the time, as Dominic DiCesare, general manager for Blue Haven Pools & Spas by Calvitti, points out, sometimes that's not the best choice.

"Your pool is like any other home repair, a small issue will just continue to turn into a major one if left unresolved," he says.

DiCesare notes that one area that should be closely watched is the joint between the coping (the material near the edge of the pool) and the decking of the pool, along with the coping itself.

Sean Meyers, co-owner of DS Pool Service, agrees.

"In many cases, there is either no caulking applied to that joint at all, or it is deteriorating," he says. "If this joint is not properly caulked, water can work its way under the coping and behind the tile, which can cause damage to either and/or both."

Meyers says another item to keep an eye on is the pool cover.

"Over time these covers do deteriorate from the UV light and wear and tear, which can cause them to become brittle and no longer act as a safety cover," he notes. "Spring is a good time to inquire about a new cover as some cover manufacturers have spring promotions if ordered by a certain date."

Tom Heath, president of Pugliese Pools, notes that it is important to keep in mind that everything has a life to it, and eventually parts are going to need to be replaced.

"On average, a heater will need to be replaced every 10 years," he says. "A pump will be maybe a little less than 10 years. It all depends on how much use these things get. Heaters, pumps, filters, all the mechanical parts—they're not going to last forever."

Heath adds that even if these pieces were in working order before winterization, there can be surprises when the pool is opened for the season.

"Rodents can make their homes in heaters," he says. "They can bring foreign stuff in there and that will need to

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A Polished Pool

be cleaned out.”

Repairs and general maintenance aside, springtime is also a good time to think about any upgrades that may be made to the

pool or its general vicinity.

One great upgrade is the addition of a robotic pool cleaner, says Walt Beyer, president of Stardust Pools.

“[The robot] will save hours of weekly cleaning and brushing your pool,” he says. “Drop it in your pool Friday night and in a few hours your pool is clean and ready for weekend entertaining.”

This will also help with pool up-keep through the season, Beyer says.

“Pool owners should strive to keep up with the weekly maintenance of their pool, chemicals, water balance and cleaning their filters,” he notes. “It is much easier to keep your pool clean and in balance than to try to correct water problems after things go wrong.”

Another upgrade to consider is a variable speed pump, Meyers says.

“A variable speed pump can save a homeowner hundreds of dollars each season while also improving the efficiency of the pool overall,” he says. “By running a



“Your pool is like any other home repair, a small issue will just continue to turn into a major one if left unresolved.”

— Dominic DiCesare,
general manager for Blue Haven Pools & Spas by Calvitti

pool at a lower RPM, but for a longer period of time each day, the pool is filtered more efficiently which leads to clearer and more chemically balanced water. These variable speeds are also much qui-

eter than standard speed pumps.”

Meyers adds some pump manufacturers offer rebates on these types of pumps and most electrical suppliers are offering rebates to the consumer when they replace

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While it may seem like a huge undertaking, Heath suggests that some homeowners may even consider replacing their pools this spring instead of simply making upgrades.

"[Replacing the pool] allows the homeowner to decide the pool shape, location and size, and they can put in whatever thrills they want, with a lifetime warranty," he says. "If I'm renovating a 30-plus-year-old pool, I can't guarantee it. And if the homeowner thinks they're going to be in the home for 10 years or more, they may as well bite the bullet and put in the pool they really want."

What is especially exciting about designing new pools and upgrading older ones these days is that there is so much more available and so many more choices than there ever have been, says Bryan Hull, partner at Del Val Pools & Spas.

"With older concrete pools, people are renovating and refacing with new coping, new tile ideas," he says. "The top and the whole

water line is a lot more exquisite than it used to be. They're plastering in a deeper, dark blue, and you can even get mosaics at the bottom of the pool now. You can put a picture of a shark, or turtles or even your favorite sports team."

Hull says well-lit pools with color changing lights are also a huge draw for homeowners these days, but by and large the most popular option is a salt water system.

"Whether it's renovation or new construction, salt water is still the biggest attraction," he says. "These systems have come so far with the ease and inexpensive operating cost.

"It's really the best option whether it's an inground, above ground or semi inground," Hull continues. "When it comes to conversion [from chlorine to salt], it's very easy. It's simple and probably takes about an hour and a half to convert to salt water."

Whatever projects homeowners may be looking into this spring, if there is anything McCool would like to express upon homeowners,

it's to start early when it comes to pool maintenance and repairs, upgrades and renovations.

"It has been a very busy winter with people planning for spring,"

he says. "If you have any kind of need to have everything done early, you need to speak to your pool company right away to get in their queue." **H&H**



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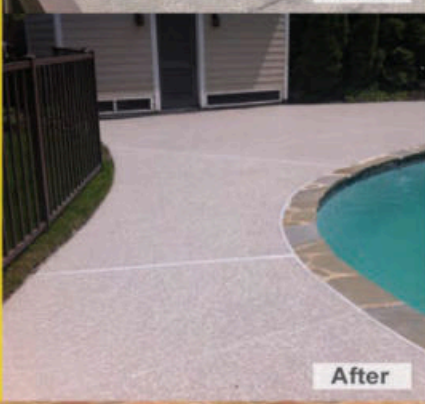






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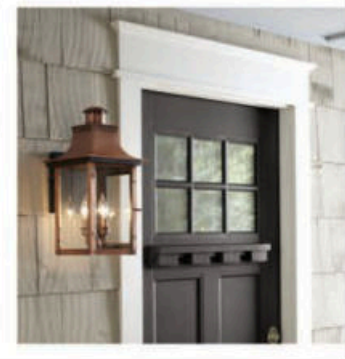
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